

# THE BLACK DEATH AND THE BURNING OF JEWS\*

Over the past forty years, studies of the period from the First Crusade at the end of the eleventh century to the rise of the mendicant orders in the early thirteenth century have dominated research into anti-Semitism in the Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> Curiously, far less attention has been devoted to the most monumental of medieval Jewish persecutions, one that eradicated almost entirely the principal Jewish communities of Europe — those of the Rhineland — along with many other areas. Coupled with mass migration that ensued, they caused a fundamental redistribution of Jewry.<sup>2</sup> These persecutions were the burning of Jews between

\* I gave versions of this essay as a paper to the Jewish Historical Society, London, to the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin and to the Jewish History Seminar at Vanderbilt. I have benefited from the criticisms of Rudolph Binion, Lisa Geuther-Sharp, Marion Kozak, Pierre Monnet, David Nirenberg, Debra Strickland, Bernard and David Wasserstein, Chris Wickham and others.

<sup>1</sup> For this rich literature, see the many recent works by Robert Chazan, Jeremy Cohen, R. I. Moore and Kenneth Stow (several of which are cited below), and the review by David Berger, *From Crusades to Blood Libels to Expulsions: Some New Approaches to Medieval Antisemitism* (New York, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> For instance, an article search in the *International Medieval Bibliography* (Brepolis, Jan. 2006) on Jews produced 1,945 hits of which 15 supposedly concern Jews and the Black Death (one title is repeated). For most of these, however, the Black Death appears only as the reference point for beginning or ending an investigation or as an aside for an examination of the persecutions of 1320–1. Hence, less than a handful of the titles actually examine the massacres of 1348–9. A recent symposium on medieval Jewry that focused on Western Europe, Christoph Cluse (ed.), *The Jews of Europe in the Middle Ages (Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries): Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at Speyer, 20–25 October 2002* (Turnhout, 2004), confirms this impression. Of its thirty-five articles, less than two pages of one article (Jörg Müller, ‘Erez gererah — “Land of Persecution”: Pogroms against the Jews in the *regnum Teutonicum* from c.1280 to 1350’, 256–7) addresses the Black Death pogroms, motivations and consequences. Similarly, recent surveys of anti-Semitism give only scant (if any) attention to the Black Death massacres. See, for instance, Edward H. Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-Three Centuries of Antisemitism*, 2nd edn (New York, 1985); Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York, 1974); Barnett Litvinoff, *The Burning Bush: Anti-Semitism and World History* (London, 1988); Gavin I. Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley, 1990); Graham Keith, *Hated without a Cause? A Survey of Anti-Semitism* (Carlisle, 1997); Albert S. Lindemann, *Esau's Tears: Modern Anti-Semitism and the Rise of the Jews* (Cambridge, 1997). For earlier studies on the consequences of plague and persecution on Jewish communities and population, see, for example, Salo W. Baron,

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1348 and 1351, when in anticipation of, or shortly after, outbreaks of plague Jews were accused of poisoning food, wells and streams, tortured into confessions, rounded up in city squares or their synagogues, and exterminated en masse.<sup>3</sup> From the numerous surviving German chroniclers, who described and often tallied the numbers murdered, and from the Hebrew *Memorbuch* and martyrologies, historians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries listed and mapped the sequence of these persecutions in great detail. In the past several years, German scholars have added further details to these maps of Jewish destruction.<sup>4</sup> The social character of that persecution (who ordered and led the massacres, who were its initial targets, and what were the motives?), however, remains hypothetical, often based on unexamined assumptions about the character and reasons for the killing of Jews. These derive from generalizations about Jews and their killers that are

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*A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 2nd edn, 18 vols. (New York, 1952–83), xi, 160–4, 365–7; Joseph Shatzmiller, ‘Les Juifs de Provence pendant la Peste Noire’, *Revue des études juives*, cxxxiii (1974), esp. 471; Kenneth R. Stow, *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994), 299. On the 1348–51 pogroms as the largest murder of Jews before the Holocaust of the twentieth century, see Klaus Bergdolt, *Der Schwarze Tod in Europa: die Grosse Pest und das Ende des Mittelalters* (Munich, 1995), 119; Jörg R. Müller, ‘Judenverfolgungen und -vertreibungen zwischen Nordsee und Südalpen im hohen und späten Mittelalter’, in Alfred Haverkamp (ed.), *Geschichte der Juden im Mittelalter von der Nordsee bis zu den Südalpen, kommentiertes Kartenwerk*, 3 vols. (Hannover, 2002), i, 213; Michael Toch, *Die Juden im mittelalterlichen Reich* (Munich, 1998), 12–13, 57, 61–2.

<sup>3</sup> By contrast, Robert Chazan, ‘From the First Crusade to the Second: Evolving Perceptions of the Christian–Jewish Conflict’, in Michael Signer and John Van Engen (eds.), *Jews and Christians in Twelfth-Century Europe* (Notre Dame, Ind., 2001), esp. 48, has argued that the persecutions of 1096 hardly altered demographic realities; instead they proved to be a positive watershed for Jewish communities in the Rhineland with subsequent demographic, economic and cultural flourishing through the twelfth century, if not later.

<sup>4</sup> For example, see the detailed summaries of these persecutions, city by city, in [Joseph Jacobs], ‘Black Death’, in Isidore Singer (ed.), *The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, new edn, 12 vols. (New York, 1925), iii, 233–6; the meticulous reconstructions by František Graus, *Pest — Geissler — Judenmorde: das 14. Jahrhundert als Krisenzeit* (Göttingen, 1987), 159–67, 249; the maps drawn in Müller, ‘Erez gererah — “Land of Persecution”’, 252–3; the survey of 1,029 communities across German defined widely from parts of the Low Countries to Austria, the Tyrol and large tracts of Eastern Europe, *Germania Judaica*, ii, *Von 1238 bis zur Mitte des 14. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Zvi Avneri, 2 pts (Tübingen, 1968); and, most recently, the ‘dynamic’ maps of the spread of the pogroms in Alfred Haverkamp, ‘Zur Chronologie der Verfolgungen zur Zeit des “Schwarzen Todes”’, in Haverkamp (ed.), *Geschichte der Juden im Mittelalter*, i, 223–42.



Detail from Hartmann Schedel, *Liber cronicarum cum figuris et ymaginibus ab inicio mundi* [the *Nuremberg Chronicle*] (Nuremberg, 1493), fo. 230<sup>v</sup>, Sp. Coll. Euing BD9-a2. By permission of the Librarian, Department of Special Collections, Glasgow University Library.

taken as near timeless over the course of the European Middle Ages, to the Holocaust of the twentieth century and beyond.<sup>5</sup>

Were the Jewish massacres around the time of the Black Death popular insurrections spurred on by Jewish exploitation, principally in their role as moneylenders? This essay investigates the

<sup>5</sup> Even with the exemplary research and close attention to sources seen in Léon Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism*, i, *From Roman Times to the Court Jews* (1955), trans. Richard Howard (London, 1974), such assumptions seep between the lines: he saw the scourge of Black Death and by implication its consequences for Jews as coming from 'simpler minds' (p. 109). See the historiographical discussion below as well as recent surveys of anti-Semitism such as the otherwise well-researched volume attentive to historical detail, Lindemann, *Esau's Tears*, 37: 'During the times of the most notorious attacks on Jews, such as the crusades of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the episodes of Black Death in the fourteenth century, and the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the attackers were generally the lawless and desperate elements of the population, over whom the church — or any other authorities — had little control'. He then goes on to claim that the Jews 'were tempting because they were often relatively wealthy'.

sources of the 1348–51 persecution in the context of popular rebellion in Europe during the later Middle Ages and compares the Black Death massacres with those later in the century, arguing that the two differed in the social composition of perpetrators and victims and in their underlying psychological causes. Such comparisons show that transhistorical explanations of violence towards Jews — even ones that argue for fundamental changes in anti-Semitism with the birth of Christianity, the later Christianization of Europe in the fourth century, or the rise of a more aggressive Church and states in the twelfth century<sup>6</sup> — fail to do justice to the sources or account for the vagaries of history. External events such as the unprecedented mortalities of the Black Death could rapidly transform the face of hatred, and afterwards, within a generation or less, the perpetrators and motives for violence could shift fundamentally yet again.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For such transhistorical theses, see Ben Zion Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain* (New York, 1995), and David Nirenberg's criticism of it in his 'Enmity and Assimilation: Jews, Christians, and Converts in Medieval Spain', *Common Knowledge*, ix (2003), 138–9; Judith Gold, *Monsters and Madonnas: The Roots of Christian Anti-Semitism*, 2nd edn (Syracuse, NY, 1999), who asserts that from AD 394 to the Nazis, Jew hatred was motivated by fear of incest; or Flannery, *Anguish of the Jews*, who turns to Freud and advises that 'we must leave the plane of history' to understand Jewish hatred and look 'to the inner sources of the soul . . . from all angles it was an anti-religious one' (pp. 292–3). For others who see Christianity's competition with Judaism as the source and explanation of modern and contemporary anti-Semitism, see Keith, *Hated without a Cause?*; Ernest L. Abel, *The Roots of Anti-Semitism* (London, 1975); Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, *Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism*, 2nd edn (Westport, 1979), 32, 147–9. For the twelfth century as the crucial break, creating a new anti-Semitism based on 'chimerical fantasies' that would define and lead inexorably to the Holocaust, see Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*. For a critique of his claims from the perspective of ancient history, see Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), 200–3. For the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century debate on whether economics or religion was the prime mover of anti-Semitism across the Middle Ages from the First Crusade to the Reformation, see Guido Kisch's historiographic survey in his *The Jews in Medieval Germany: A Study of their Legal and Social Status* (Chicago, 1949), 322–31.

<sup>7</sup> It has recently even been argued that the massive destruction of Jewish communities bore no relation to the anxieties sparked by the Black Death: Iris Ritzmann, 'Judenmord als Folge des "Schwarzen Todes": ein medizinhistorischer Mythos?', *Medizin, Gesellschaft und Geschichte: Jahrbuch des Instituts für Geschichte der Medizin der Robert Bosch Stiftung*, xvii (1999). See also the strong refutation of this thesis by Karl-Heinz Leven, 'Schwarzer Tod, Brunnenvergiftung und Judenmord — nur ein medizinhistorischer Mythos?', *Praxis*, lxxxix (2000). But this critique also pitches the Jewish burning on a transhistorical plane that extends from Thucydides to the modern period.

In recent work I have argued that the Black Death realigned the trajectories of social conflict north and south of the Alps.<sup>8</sup> From two separate paths before 1348, the experience of plague unified trends north and south, despite the lack of any evidence of joint co-ordination or communication linking such distant insurgents across the Alps. First, for the Black Death and its immediate aftermath, 1348–52, social movements with concrete aims to redress economic grievances, challenge political authority or question prevailing social hierarchies are difficult to find either north or south of the Alps. In Tuscany, the Black Death abruptly terminated workers' newly acquired zeal to topple governments or protest against burgeoning capitalist exploitation as in revolts of artisans and disenfranchised workers in Siena, Florence and Bologna earlier in the fourteenth century. By 1345, such insurgents had formed working men's associations with strike funds, attempted to overthrow merchant oligarchies, created (even if only momentarily) their own guilds, and claimed rights as citizens. From the outbreak of pestilence in 1348 to around 1355, by contrast, the chronicles and archival sources — judicial records, town council deliberations and decrees — give few signs of popular revolt.

In France, revolts, even minor skirmishes, are more difficult to find between the Black Death and Étienne Marcel's movements against the regent Charles and the Jacquerie of 1358, despite an older pre-plague tradition of insurgence by the *menu peuple*, especially in the north of France and Flanders, that reached back to at least 1245. From my sampling of nearly three hundred chronicles, less than a handful of popular revolts appear for the years immediately after the Black Death, and the most prominent of these were initiated by elites rather than artisans or peasants.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Popular Protest in Late Medieval Europe: Italy, France, and Flanders*, ed. and trans. Samuel K. Cohn (Manchester, 2004); Samuel K. Cohn, *Lust for Liberty: The Politics of Social Revolt in Medieval Europe, 1200–1425. Italy, France, and Flanders* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006); Samuel K. Cohn, 'Popular Insurrection and the Black Death: A Comparative Perspective', in Christopher Dyer, Peter Coss and Chris Wickham (eds.), *Rodney Hilton's Middle Ages* (Past and Present Supplement no. 2, Oxford, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Cohn, *Lust for Liberty*, ch. 9. From exhaustive research into the secondary literature, Bernard Chevalier finds even less evidence of popular insurrection in this period: see his 'Corporations, conflits politiques et paix sociale en France aux XIV<sup>e</sup> et XV<sup>e</sup> siècles', in Bernard Chevalier (ed.), *Les Bonnes Villes, l'état et la société dans la France de la fin du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Orléans, 1995), 285.

Despite the rarity of such social revolts, the Black Death nonetheless gave rise to mass movements and violence: flagellant groups and the burning of Jews swept across German-speaking areas, Spain, France and the Low Countries from September 1348 to 1351.<sup>10</sup> Italy may have been somewhat exceptional,<sup>11</sup> but even here the Jewish communities of Mantua and Parma were attacked, and these may not have been isolated cases.<sup>12</sup> In Sicily, Catalans took the place of the Jews as widespread massacres of these foreigners spread in 1348 from Palermo to Agrigento, Trapani and most of the Val de Mazara.<sup>13</sup>

The abbot of Tournai, Gilles li Muisis, recorded daily the emotions that swung from free love to competing forms of ritualistic purging and devotion. These hardly show the immediate post-plague period as peaceful, even in Flanders, where mass persecution and the burning of Jews was not nearly as widespread as in Germany, southern France, and Spain.<sup>14</sup> This violence, however, differed markedly from the organized protests of peasants, labourers or bourgeois against city councils, counts or kings seen before the plague. First, although these ritual groups with their distinctive garb and penitential practices could not have sprung forth spontaneously, or 'literally [have] had no head', as Henry of Hervodia and other German chroniclers claimed,<sup>15</sup> the sources give little

<sup>10</sup> On the geographical dimensions of the Black Death pogroms, see *Germania Judaica*, ed. Avneri, ii, pp. xxxvii–xxxix.

<sup>11</sup> England may have been exceptional as well, since it had few Jews to attack, having expelled them in 1290: see Christopher Harper-Bill, 'The English Church and English Religion after the Black Death', in W. M. Ormrod and P. G. Lindley (eds.), *The Black Death in England* (Stamford, 1996), 107. However, according to Raymond Crawford, *Plague and Pestilence in Literature and Art* (Oxford, 1914), 125, 'In England the Black Death served to revive the perennial charges brought against the Jews'.

<sup>12</sup> Cecil Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy* (Philadelphia, 1946), 142.

<sup>13</sup> Michele da Piazza, *Cronaca*, ed. Antonino Giuffrida (Palermo, 1980), 92.

<sup>14</sup> Mass executions of Jews occurred in neighbouring Hainault and Brabant: see Roger Kohn, *Les Juifs de la France du Nord dans la seconde moitié du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Louvain, 1988), 10; *Germania Judaica*, ed. Avneri, ii, 100, 140. For cities in France and Spain, see Bergdolt, *Der Schwarze Tod in Europa*, 143, 240.

<sup>15</sup> See translation in *The Black Death*, ed. and trans. Rosemary Horrox (Manchester, 1994), 150–3: 'They suddenly sprang up in all parts of Germany . . . They were said, as if in confirmation of the prophecy, to be without a head either because they literally had no head — that is to say no one to organize and lead them — or because they had no head in the sense of having no brain and no judgment' (p. 150). This source then describes the violence between the flagellants and the clergy, the Dominicans in particular. Other sources, moreover, referred to the flagellants as 'the headless sect' ('die kopflose Sekte' and 'acephala gens'), which, according to Klaus Arnold, 'Pest — Geissler — Judenmorde: das Beispiel Würzburg', in Dieter Rödel and Joachim Schneider (eds.), *Strukturen der Gesellschaft im Mittelalter: interdisziplinäre*

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indication of prior planning, assemblies or elected leaders, if elections in fact took place.<sup>16</sup> None appears even in a chronicle as meticulous as that of the abbot of Tournai, who devoted most of an entire second chronicle to the flagellants and other penitent movements based on eyewitness reporting in his city. Secondly, few names of individual leaders emerge from the chronicles, condemnations or other official documents, and those few who do emerge were members of the Church or the aristocracy.<sup>17</sup> Further, while mendicants and various penitent groups battled among themselves, the violence that fills the chronicles for 1348–50 reveals little hint of class cleavages. Rather than struggling for concrete goals or redressing specific political, economic or social grievances, this violence targeted forces outside political and economic hierarchies to resolve anxieties, fears and anger. In the case of accusations of well-poisoning, it was outsiders — Jews, Catalans, foreign beggars or simply the poor — who served as scapegoats. Or, pitched further afield, other outside forces were blamed — God's wrath or the configurations of stars. Sometimes these outside causes were combined, as by a burgess of Narbonne, deputy of Aymer, Vicomte of Narbonne: after reporting the torturing and sentencing to death by hot pincers, disembowelling, and burning of many poor — beggars accused of poisoning rivers, churches and foodstuffs in April 1348, he concluded, 'we believe that it is certainly the combined effects of the planets and the potions which are causing the mortality'.<sup>18</sup>

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*Mediävistik in Würzburg* (Wiesbaden, 1996), 367, was a standard name for the flagellants. On the religious belief of the flagellants, see, most recently, Mitchell B. Merback, 'Living Image of Pity: Mimetic Violence, Peacemaking and Salvific Spectacle in the Flagellant Processions of the Later Middle Ages', in Debra Higgs Strickland (ed.), *Images of Medieval Sanctity: Essays in Honour of Gary Dickson* (Leiden, 2007), 151–9.

<sup>16</sup> Graus, *Pest — Geissler — Judenmorde*, 49–51, emphasizes the flagellants' organization, given their detailed dress and rituals, but points to no elected leaders, assemblies or social programmes. In fact, he maintains the opposite: the flagellants of 1349 did not constitute a social movement; nor did they have any social or political agenda (pp. 54–5). See also Bergdolt, *Der Schwarze Tod in Europa*, 107–19.

<sup>17</sup> According to Kervyn de Lettenhove, *Histoire de Flandre*, 6 vols. (Brussels, 1847–50), iii, 358, Tournai had three leaders: two were knights and the other a canon of Saint-Nicolas-des-Près, but he does not indicate that they were named in the sources.

<sup>18</sup> *Black Death*, ed. Horrox, 223. Beggars were also attacked as plague spreaders at Carcassonne and Grasse, and the same happened to pilgrims in Catalonia: see Jean-Noël Biraben, *Les Hommes et la Peste en France et dans les pays européens et méditerranéens*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1975–6), i, 59.

## I

I have argued elsewhere that this chronological development in violence and social protest followed tracks traced by other avenues of thought and action, such as with changes in approach towards and attitudes about plague seen in doctors' tracts and chronicles.<sup>19</sup> In plague tracts written in the immediate aftermath of the Black Death, doctors turned either to the stars and other 'remote causes' of plague or in utter despondency to God, claiming that human intervention was of little use. As the Montpellier doctor Simon de Couvain lamented in 1350, the Black Death had left medicine in confusion; 'the art of Hippocrates was lost'. Chroniclers faced the Black Death with similar pessimism about the efficacy of human action to combat it (apart, that is, from an appeal to God's mercy — sin had brought on God's scourge, and only prayer could calm it). These writers showed even less confidence in doctors and science. As the Sieneese Agnolo di Tura and the Florentine Matteo Villani saw it, doctors either ran off with plague patients' money or hastened their deaths. Further, these writers pictured the plague's origins in apocalyptic fantasies of black snows melting mountains, floods of snakes and toads, and eight-legged worms that killed with their stench.

These are the images that historians have tended to remember and, many have assumed, that filled the plague-ridden years of the later Middle Ages and the early modern period, but what is extraordinary is just how quickly these explanations and images disappeared. By the 1360s and increasingly towards the end of the century, doctors and chroniclers turned about-face. From utter despondency, doctors began to boast of the number of plague patients they now claimed to have cured with their newly devised surgical interventions and medical recipes. With experience and experimentation, they claimed to have gone beyond the ancients in understanding epidemics and in the art of healing; their generation of doctors had triumphed over plague — and even over nature herself. Similarly, the chroniclers turned from anti-doctor diatribes to include doctors' plague recipes within their chronicles, and advised their readers to seek out valiant doctors for

<sup>19</sup> What follows summarizes data drawn from over five hundred chronicles and two hundred plague tracts discussed in Samuel K. Cohn, *The Black Death Transformed: Disease and Culture in Early Renaissance Europe* (London, 2002); and from 1,112 revolts and popular movements analysed in Cohn, *Lust for Liberty*.



protection against plague. Natural causes — war, overcrowding and poverty — replaced the 1348 tales of toads and black snows to explain the repeated bouts of plague.

Why the sudden shift? As the pope's doctor Raymundus de Chalmelli recalled in 1383, mortality and morbidity had declined steeply and steadily with each successive plague from 1348 — a trend that surviving documents such as last wills and testaments, necrologies and burial records can now largely corroborate. Along with other contemporaries, both medical and lay, Chalmelli saw this steady improvement not as a function of bodily immunity or natural selection, but as the consequence of conscious human intervention — political, legal, administrative and principally medical. I argue that the same about-face in attitudes occurred with populations more generally. From 1348 to 1350, wide groups of people faced the plague with little hope and turned inwardly against the self in ceremonious expiation, or outwardly beyond society to God or against the outsider — the beggar, the foreigner and the Jew. Afterwards, however, from the mid 1350s to the 1380s, and in most places on to the early fifteenth century, social violence changed. Quiescence, flagellant purging, and the mass murder of beggars, Catalans or Jews disappear from the records. With increasing regularity peasants, artisans and bourgeois now directed their misgivings and frustration against those in power within society. They organized themselves to oppose royal and town taxes, economic exploitation, legal and social injustice. Above all else, they sought rights of citizenship to participate in government and determine the broad contours of their daily affairs. Like the plague doctors and chroniclers, they now possessed a new confidence in their abilities to change society, the here and now, in concrete, practical ways.

## II

But did the violence of 1348–51 lack a class dimension and an economic rationale? According to the historiography, we should have our doubts. A historian of the Black Death has even proclaimed: 'One of the most important effects of the Black Death was its role in the provocation of popular rebellion'.<sup>20</sup> The flagellants have been seen by Norman Cohn and others as

<sup>20</sup> Robert S. Gottfried, *The Black Death: Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe* (London, 1983), 97. Although Gottfried goes on to describe the big three revolts of the late fourteenth century (the Jacquerie, Ciompi, and English Peasants'

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a movement of the poor, composed of peasants, weavers and cobblers; but Cohn does not cite his sources, and I have not found any documents to back his claims.<sup>21</sup> The German chroniclers instead described the flagellants emphatically as lacking any class basis. To quote the principal chronicle of Mainz, *Chronicon Moguntinum*, they included 'those of great wealth and lesser wealth as well as paupers; the old along with the young, circulated everywhere cruelly whipping themselves'.<sup>22</sup> Gilles li Muisis described various penitent groups — and not just flagellants — who marched through his town in 1349: from lashings with cattle-prong whips to foot washing, their penitent performances and search for followers erupted in violent conflicts for ritual space in front of Tournai's principal churches. Judging by these near-daily accounts, none of the penitent groups was made up of the poor or the rabble. Just the opposite: even though the flagellants at times defied the local clergy and eventually the city councillors of Tournai, noblemen and noble ladies filled their ranks. Inspired by the penitents' example, women ended their open adultery and put aside their jewels and slinky gowns to join the flagellants — which hardly suggests destitution.<sup>23</sup> Further, as other contemporary chroniclers such as Closener of Strasbourg and Matthias of Neuenberg make clear, 'the flagellants were certainly not a movement of the underclass'.<sup>24</sup>

Jewish historians, thinking along similar lines, have charged

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Revolt of 1381), he sees them as stemming from the collapse of law and order set off in 1348.

<sup>21</sup> Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*, 2nd edn (London, 1970), 128, 137: 'The movement always consisted in the main of peasants and artisans'.

<sup>22</sup> *Chronicon Moguntinum 1347–1406 und Fortsetzung bis 1478*, in *Die Chroniken der mittelhochdeutschen Städte: Mainz*, ed. K. Hegel, 2 vols. (Die Chroniken der deutschen Städte, xvii–xviii, Leipzig, 1881–2), ii, 158; see also *Continuatio Mellicensis*, ed. Ludwig Konrad Bethmann (Monumenta Germaniae Historica [hereafter MGH], Scriptores, ix, Hannover, 1851), 513, says much the same. For Graus, *Pest — Geissler — Judenmorde*, 49, 53–4, it was a wide movement that cut across social groups but was hardly one dominated by the 'rabble' or lower classes. Farm labourers even needed the permission of their lords to join the movement. Richard Kieckhefer, 'Radical Tendencies in the Flagellant Movement of the Mid Fourteenth Century', *Jl Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, iv (1974), 160, even questions whether the flagellants had any lower-class constituency in German-speaking areas and the Low Countries.

<sup>23</sup> *Chronicon Aegidii Li Muisis, abbatis Sancti-Martini Tornacensis alterum*, in *Corpus Chronicorum Flandriae*, ed. J.-J. de Smet, 4 vols. (Brussels, 1837–65), iii, 341–2.

<sup>24</sup> Graus, *Pest — Geissler — Judenmorde*, 53.

that artisans and peasants comprised the 'mobs' who accused Jews of well- and food-poisoning in attempts to end Christendom and then retaliated by murdering the Jews by mass conflagration. Carlo Ginzburg, for instance, has seen a sharp break between the persecutions of 1321 that began with the lepers but finished with blaming Jews and those movements that, twenty-seven years later, spread across great tracts of Europe following the plague. In 1321:

the political and religious authorities . . . directed the latent hostilities of the populace against precise targets. In 1348–9 those who wielded power had taken very different positions toward the supposed conspiracy: some had been opposed, some had yielded to the pressures of the mob, some had possibly anticipated them. But this time the pressure from below carried much greater weight. One gets the impression that in the space of thirty years, in a generation, the obsession with conspiracy had formed a thick sediment in the popular mentality. The outbreak or, more often, the mere imminence of the plague had brought it to the surface.<sup>25</sup>

Others have portrayed the Black Death pogroms in still starker terms as a class struggle against elites, who were protecting Jews against 'the ordinary folk'. According to Mordechai Breuer, these 'ordinary folk' hated the Jews because they had 'served the merchants and the aristocrats, and with their loans and with their capital, helped establish the urban economy and the city's governing political and territorial independence'. Further, the Jews had exploited artisans 'with loans at usurious rates'.<sup>26</sup> Others have pushed the case for class struggle further still, seeing the massacres as the revenge of impoverished debtors against a privileged elite of Jewish creditors: 'Those of the working classes' confronted 'Jewish rentiers and capitalists' to cancel their debts and seize the Jews' wealth.<sup>27</sup> Certainly, earlier waves of Jewish

<sup>25</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (Harmondsworth, 1992), 68. Before him, Bénédicte Bauchau, 'Science et racisme: les juifs, la lèpre et la peste', *Stanford French Rev.*, xiii (1989), 24, concluded the opposite about 1320–1: 'Ce soulèvement populaire est le premier, dans l'histoire des relations judéo-chrétiennes, à manifester clairement la composante populaire et profane de l'antisémitisme'.

<sup>26</sup> Mordechai Breuer, 'The "Black Death" and Antisemitism', in Shmuel Almog (ed.) and Nathan H. Reisner (trans.), *Antisemitism through the Ages* (Exeter, 1988), 145. For a similar view, see Biraben, *Les Hommes et la Peste*, i, 57–65.

<sup>27</sup> Despite recognizing the heroic stance of the guild government headed by Peter Swaber to protect the Jews and the overthrow of that government by Bishop Berthold aided by patricians and the rural aristocracy, Max Ephraïm, 'Histoire des Juifs d'Alsace et particulièrement de Strasbourg depuis le milieu du XIII<sup>e</sup> jusqu'à la fin du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle', pt 1, *Revue des études juives*, lxxvii (1923), 154; pt 2, *ibid.*, lxxviii (1924), 50–2, claimed that the underlying cause of the 1349 auto-da-fé of the Jews at Strasbourg and elsewhere derived from 'popular passion' and an economic drive

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persecution can point to the participation of artisans and peasants and may have had economic motives;<sup>28</sup> but what is the evidence for the Black Death massacres?

It is true that some at the pinnacle of power, such as Duke Albrecht of Austria (at least initially) and especially Pope Clement VI, seem to have risen above the hysteria, seeing the violence against the Jews as irrational and dangerous to Christian society. Early on, Clement promulgated *Sicut Judeis* (26 September 1348), which argued that Jews were dying in numbers as great as the Christians, and that they would not have been so stupid as to poison themselves. Moreover, Christians were victims of plague in places such as England where there were no Jews.<sup>29</sup> Duke Albrecht appears to fit more or less Ginzburg's second category — those who initially opposed killing the Jews but who eventually bent under 'mob' pressure and capitulated.<sup>30</sup> In the

(n. 27 cont.)

among the lower classes to seize Jewish property and cancel their debts. For later arguments that advanced this idea, elevating it to a class struggle between 'proletariat' debtors and privileged Jews who were their creditors, see the review of the literature by Alfred Haverkamp, 'Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes im Gesellschaftsgefüge deutscher Städte', in Alfred Haverkamp (ed.), *Zur Geschichte der Juden im Deutschland des späten Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit* (Stuttgart, 1981), 31–5, and especially the study of Erfurt by Werner Mägdefrau, *Der Thüringer Städtebund im Mittelalter* (Weimar, 1977). Earlier, Günter Franz, *Der deutsche Bauernkrieg* (Munich and Berlin, 1933), 74, soon to join the National Socialists, had come to the same conclusions as the later Marxist Mägdefrau about the Jewish persecutions of the Black Death. According to Kisch, *Jews in Medieval Germany*, 478, Franz produced no evidence for these 'hypothetical assertions'. Still, more recent historians such as Graus, *Pest — Geissler — Judenmorde*, 360–1, have speculated that exploitation of peasants and the poor by Jewish moneylenders was an underlying cause of the Black Death persecutions. As with previous historians on both the right and the left, he gives no evidence of it.

<sup>28</sup> The literature on the Jewish massacres spurred on by the religious zeal of the First Crusades in 1096 is vast. For subsequent attacks on the Jews at the end of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries in German-speaking lands (*regnum Teutonicum*) such as the 'Rintfleisch' Persecutions (1298), perhaps led by a butcher, and other pogroms stirred by claims of the desecration of the Host, see Müller, 'Erez gererah — "Land of Persecution"'. He maintains that for these 'the persecutors themselves were mostly craftsmen and wage labourers' (p. 253) and the Jewish pogroms in Franconia during the summer of 1337 'were committed primarily by roving farm labourers', even though they were probably led by the nobility, who were the ones heavily indebted to Jewish moneylenders (p. 255).

<sup>29</sup> See *The Apostolic See and the Jews: Documents, 492–1404*, ed. Shlomo Simonsohn (Studies and Texts, xciv, Toronto 1988), 397–8. According to Biraben, *Les Hommes et la Peste*, i, 60, Pedro IV 'the Ceremonius' also intervened to protect the Jews in Aragon and Catalonia.

<sup>30</sup> Earlier, Duke Albrecht had successfully interceded with Pope Benedict XII against the perpetrators of the 'Pulkau' Host desecration on Easter Day, 1338: see

(cont. on p. 15)

town of Zofingen (diocese of Constance), the Jewish community had been accused of poisoning wells, but only two Jews had been tortured and killed on the wheel because the duke had intervened and ordered an end to the persecution. In January 1349, however, local rulers in Winterthur and Diessenhoven challenged the duke's protection of the Jews, demanding that he burn the Jews or they would do the job for him. The duke capitulated, and by an order from his own judges, he burned the Jews throughout the counties under his protection.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, the 'enlightened' Emperor Charles IV of Bohemia, known for his cultural development of Prague and central Europe, was less equivocal and hardly a beacon of rationality when it came to Jews. Instead of protecting them, in advance of the persecutions he made arrangements for the disposal of Jewish property and granted immunity to leading burghers, bishops and knights at Nuremberg, Regensburg, Augsburg and Frankfurt so that they could direct and engage in the execution of Jews there. Further, after the massacres, he cancelled debts owed to Jews by local elites in many other towns across German-speaking territories.<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, German chroniclers, who represented a cross-section of intellectual elites, both secular and ecclesiastical, show a wide spectrum of attitudes and beliefs concerning the question of Jews poisoning wells; but on the whole they did not side with the Jews, nor were they repulsed by the anti-Semitic hysteria and mass murder. Matthias of Neuenberg was one of the few to sympathize with the 'unfortunate' plight of the Jews, and clearly

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Müller, 'Erez gererah — "Land of Persecution"', 256. Similarly, in 1348 in the Dauphiné and in Savoy, the dauphin and count initially resisted the persecution of the Jews but afterwards conducted the massacres themselves: Biraben, *Les Hommes et la Peste*, i, 60.

<sup>31</sup> *Black Death*, ed. Horrox, 209–10.

<sup>32</sup> Among others, see Graus, *Pest — Geissler — Judenmorde*, 227–41; Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and its Relation to Modern Antisemitism* (1943), 2nd edn (Philadelphia, 1983), 105; Haverkamp, 'Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes', 65; Müller, 'Erez gererah — "Land of Persecution"', 257; Bergdolt, *Der Schwarze Tod in Europa*, 136–9. For Charles's pardon to those in Strasbourg who burned the Jews, see *Urkunden und Akten der Stadt Strassburg: Urkundenbuch der Stadt Strassburg*, v, *Politische Urkunden vom 1332 bis 1380*, ed. Hans Witte and Georg Wolfram (Strassburg, 1896), no. 217; for other towns in Alsace, see Ephraïm, 'Histoire des Juifs d'Alsace', pt 1, pp. 137–8; pt 2, p. 55. For Augsburg, Colmar, Memmingen, Nördlingen, Sankt Gallen, Schlettstadt, Strasbourg and Überlingen, see *Germania Judaica*, ed. Avneri, ii, 36, 418, 535, 595, 734, 745, 803, 840.

disbelieved the rumours of well-poisoning and the confessions of the soon-to-be-burned Jews made under torture.<sup>33</sup> Henry of Hervodia narrated the horrific suffering of the Jews, 'cruelly slain . . . women with their small children cruelly and inhumanly fed to the flames'.<sup>34</sup> Most of the German chroniclers, however, simply reported that the Jews were burned in 1349, gave the saint's day of the burnings,<sup>35</sup> and occasionally, as in the town chronicle of Nuremberg, named the square where they had been herded and massacred. Most repeated the charges of Jews poisoning rivers and wells, noting them down as cold facts without casting any doubts on their veracity and without any outcry against the mass executions of men, women and children that ensued.<sup>36</sup>

Still other chroniclers were more vehement in their condemnations of the Jews as plague spreaders. While they dispassionately tallied the numbers of Jews exterminated in one city after another, they reported the rumours and justified them as historical facts. Instead of recording the cries of women and children as they were thrown into the fires, chroniclers such as the 'World Chronicler'

<sup>33</sup> *Die Chronik des Mathias von Neuenburg*, ed. Adolf Hofmeister (MGH, *Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum*, new ser., iv, Berlin, 1924), 264–9.

<sup>34</sup> *Liber de rebus memorabilioribus sive Chronicon Henrici de Hervodia*, ed. August Potthast (Göttingen, 1859), 277, 280. The chronicler Conrad von Megenberg reported the poisoning of wells by the Jews as fact, but then at least questioned its logic in Vienna where Jews were dying in such numbers that they had to enlarge their cemetery: Poliakov, *History of Anti-Semitism*, i, 113.

<sup>35</sup> On the pattern of days when the massacres occurred, see Haverkamp, 'Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes', 50–9.

<sup>36</sup> See, for instance, *Chronik des Dietrich Westhoff von 750–1550* (Dortmund), in *Die Chroniken der westfälischen und niederrheinischen Städte: Dortmund und Neuss*, ed. K. Hegel (Die Chroniken der deutschen Städte, xx, Leipzig, 1887), 213; *Kölner Jahrbücher des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts: Recension A*, in *Die Chroniken der niederrheinischen Städte: Köln*, ed. K. Schröder, 3 vols. (Die Chroniken der deutschen Städte, xii–xiv, Leipzig, 1875–7), i, 22; *Recension B*, *ibid.*, 36; *Recension D*, *ibid.*, 131; *Koelhoffische Chronik*, *ibid.*, iii, 686; *Die Chroniken der Stadt Nürnberg* [Ulman Stromer], in *Die Chroniken der fränkischen Städte: Nürnberg*, ed. K. Hegel, 5 vols. (Die Chroniken der deutschen Städte, i–iii, x–xi, Leipzig, 1862–74), i, 25; *Chronik des Hector Mülich*, in *Die Chroniken der schwäbischen Städte: Augsburg*, ed. Friedrich Roth, 9 vols. (Die Chroniken der deutschen Städte, xxii, Leipzig, 1865–1929), iii, 1; *Anonyme Chronik von 991–1483*, *ibid.*, 459. See also the chronicles of the Franciscan Herman Gigas of Franconia and Heinrich Truchess von Diessenhoven, a canon of Constance, who had been Pope John XXII's chaplain; *Black Death*, ed. Horrox, 207–10. Neither doubted that the Jews had poisoned wells or that they were conspiring to bring an end to Christendom. Heinrich welcomed the mass killing of the Jews that ensued: 'And blessed be God who confounded the ungodly who were plotting the extinction of his church' (p. 208). For other chronicle descriptions that narrated the Jewish slaughter 'with astonishing coldness', see Bergdolt, *Der Schwarze Tod in Europa*, 133–5, which he calls the moral depths of German historiography.



of the monastery of Albert in Cologne stressed the 'horrible means by which the Jews wished to extinguish all of Christendom, through their poisons of frogs and spiders mixed into oil and cheese'.<sup>37</sup> In two poems, Michael de Leone, a contemporary chronicler of Würzburg and the protonotary of the region's bishop, agreed with the accusations that the Jews had poisoned streams, and thus 'the Jews deserved to be swallowed up in the flames'.<sup>38</sup> Still other chroniclers reported contemporary opinions that anticipate Holocaust denials of the twentieth century. A chronicler of Frankfurt doubted that the extermination of the Jews had taken place. He reported that some residents had pointed to Frankfurt's Jewish neighbourhood as burned to the ground with all its inhabitants gone and without a single building left standing, but the chronicler backed claims that the destruction had resulted from an accidental fire and was not the consequence of any Jewish massacre.<sup>39</sup> In short, chroniclers' attitudes do not show a rational elite above the fray, sympathetic towards the Jews in the face of their mass execution; Clement's *Sicut Judeis* was far from being the rule.

### III

What about the actors: were those who forced Duke Albrecht's hand into burning the Jews 'a mob' of artisans and peasants? Or, throughout the Rhineland, was it a rabble stricken with fear and anxiety in the face of plague, who rose up against the Jews while the elites sought to protect them? Hardly. Few, if any, chroniclers pointed to peasants, artisans, or even the faceless mob as the perpetrators of the violence against the Jews in 1348 to 1351. A chronicler of Strasbourg, Jacob von Königshofen (1346–1420),<sup>40</sup> who wrote a generation after the event, was one of the few to claim that any from the lower classes played even a minor role in the

<sup>37</sup> *Die Weltchronik des Mönchs Albert, 1273/77 – 1454/56*, ed. Rolf Sprandel (MGH, *Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum*, new ser., xvii, Munich, 1994), 109.

<sup>38</sup> Cited in Arnold, 'Pest — Geissler — Judenmorde: das Beispiel Würzburg', 368: 'Iudeos digno proprio consumpsit in igno [*sic*]'.  
<sup>39</sup> Johannes Latomus, *Acta aliquot vetustiora in civitate Francofurtensi . . .*, in *Fontes rerum Germanicarum*, ed. Johannes Friederich Böhmer, 4 vols. (Stuttgart, 1843–68), iv, 415–16.

<sup>40</sup> On von Königshofen, see *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Source Book, 315–1791*, ed. Jacob Rader Marcus, 2nd edn (Cincinnati, 1999), 50; Haverkamp, 'Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes', 30–1.

plague massacres. He reported the burning of Jews 'in many cities', adding that, once expelled, 'they were caught by the peasants and stabbed to death or drowned'.<sup>41</sup> But this passage follows his description of the conference held at Benfeld on 8 February 1349, organized and led by the bishop of Strasbourg, Berthold II von Bucheck, and was attended by 'all the feudal lords of Alsace' and patrician representatives of three imperial cities. They gathered to overthrow the decisions of the more popular guild-based government of Strasbourg, one of the few to express doubts in late 1348 about Jews being guilty of spreading the plague with their poisons. Earlier, the guildsmen had resisted Berthold's demands to prosecute and burn the Jews. Thus, before any peasant might have stabbed or drowned any escaping Jew, the Jewish community had first to have been sentenced to mass death, and that sentence and its execution came from the top of society: Bishop Berthold's conference, backed by the military might of the Alsatian nobility. As von Königshofen admitted: 'So finally the Bishop and the lords and the Imperial cities agreed to do away with Jews'.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the principal source for these events was the contemporary chronicler Friedrich Closener, who reported nothing about peasants adding their hands to the aftermath of the mass conflagration, killing the few who managed to slip through the net.<sup>43</sup>

The idea that the attacks against the Jews in 1348–51 came from the blind fury of 'mobs' comprising workers, artisans and peasants derives almost exclusively from the musings of modern historians, not from the medieval sources.<sup>44</sup> Patrician-dominated city councils did not disbelieve or deny the rumours of the Jewish

<sup>41</sup> *Chronik des Jakob Twinger von Königshofen*, in *Die Chroniken der oberrheinischen Städte: Strassburg*, ed. K. Hegel, 2 vols. (*Die Chroniken der deutschen Städte*, viii–ix, Leipzig, 1870–1), ii, 759–65; translated only in part in *Jew in the Medieval World*, ed. Marcus, 52–3. See also Graus, *Pest — Geissler — Judenmorde*, 242.

<sup>42</sup> *Jew in the Medieval World*, ed. Marcus, 50. On Berthold and the 14 February 1349 auto-da-fé, see Ephraïm, 'Histoire des Juifs d'Alsace', pt 1, pp. 143–5; pt 2, pp. 39–40.

<sup>43</sup> *Fritsche (Friedrich) Closener's Chronik, 1362*, in *Die Chroniken der oberrheinischen Städte: Strassburg*, ed. Hegel, i, 104. See also *Urkunden und Akten der Stadt Strassburg*, v, ed. Witte and Wolfram, no. 205. On Closener and the history of the Jewish massacres in Strasbourg taken from Closener and the contemporary chronicler Matthias von Neuenberg, see Haverkamp, 'Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes', 63–5.

<sup>44</sup> For such assumptions that anti-Semitic violence originated from the lower classes, and that Jewish moneylending was its cause, see Johannes Nohl, *The Black Death: A Chronicle of the Plague, Compiled from Contemporary Sources*, trans. C. H. Clarke (London, 1926), 116, 122; *Jew in the Medieval World*, ed. Marcus, 49–50;

(cont. on p. 19)

well-poisonings, and when cities such as Basel or Strasbourg did raise questions, patricians — not the rabble — marched on the town halls and ‘compelled more broadly based guild councils to take an oath that they would burn the Jews’.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, archival sources allow us to go beyond the chroniclers in identifying more closely who initiated the accusations, tortures and mass executions. A remarkable source survives from the municipal archives of Strasbourg. As early as August 1348,<sup>46</sup> before Bishop Berthold’s conference at Benfeld, the guild-based city council of Strasbourg sent letters to principal cities across the Rhineland, Savoy, and into the Swiss cantons ruled by Duke Albrecht of Austria. From Cologne to Lausanne, the councillors sought evidence of Jews poisoning wells, springs and food supplies.<sup>47</sup> At least nineteen letters from sixteen cities or their noble lords survive. Several contain detailed descriptions of the individuals accused and tortured by patrician city councils; under duress, many of them revealed networks of supposed accomplices. Only one city council — that of Cologne — questioned whether Jews had poisoned wells and food supplies.<sup>48</sup> The rest — city councils, mayors and noble castellans from Basel, Bern, Breisach am Rhein, Chillon, Colmar, Freiburg im Breisgau, Kenzingen, Lausanne, Mainz, Münsingen, Obernehenheim, Offenburg, Schlettstadt, Villeneuve, Waldkirch and Zofingen — supplied ‘proof’ that Jews had been found guilty in these cities’ tribunals of causing the plague through poisoning. Notaries registered the accusations, and their courts duly examined the evidence and delivered their verdicts.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, several of these letters, such as one from the castellan of Chillon, included accusations and trial inquests from more than one city (in this case, Bern and Villeneuve), and included summaries of reports from these cities that Jews had been arrested for such poisoning ‘in

(n. 44 cont.)

Breuer, ‘“Black Death” and Antisemitism’, 139–51; Anna Foa, *The Jews of Europe after the Black Death*, trans. Andrea Grover (Berkeley, 2000), 16; and discussion above.

<sup>45</sup> *Jew in the Medieval World*, ed. Marcus, 52.

<sup>46</sup> *Urkunden und Akten der Stadt Strassburg*, v, ed. Witte and Wolfram, no. 173. The first surviving letter answering Strasbourg’s request for evidence on the alleged Jewish poisonings came from Cologne on 10 August 1348.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, nos. 179, 185, 190; *Black Death*, ed. Horrox, 219–20.

<sup>48</sup> *Urkunden und Akten der Stadt Strassburg*, v, ed. Witte and Wolfram, nos. 173, 175, 178, 181, 190; *Black Death*, ed. Horrox, 210–20.

<sup>49</sup> *Urkunden und Akten der Stadt Strassburg*, v, ed. Witte and Wolfram, nos. 179, 180, 182–9, 196, 208, 209, 212.

many other places'. The letter from Chillon then listed Évian, Geneva, Hauteville and La Croisette.<sup>50</sup>

Reflecting on previous massacres of Jews, the aldermen of Cologne raised concerns that pursuing such accusations might ignite commoners to revolt, and the latter could spread violence down the Rhineland. Yet these fears were hypothetical: they were not reports of 'the *populares*' actually whipping up anti-Jewish hysteria in their regions or initiating the massacres. Indeed, not a single letter written by these town mayors, councillors or castellans pointed to mobs of peasants or artisans as the accusers of the Jews, nor as forcing reluctant patrician city councillors to murder the Jews. Instead, either patrician elites or the nobility (as in Strasbourg) first circulated the rumours, then rounded up the Jews, and tortured them in order to make them confess and name their supposed accomplices in the manufacture, transport and distribution of the poisons. On the basis of such investigations and legal proceedings, these patrician leaders or rural castellans went on to burn the Jews in their cities and regions. As a letter from Chillon put it: 'All the confessions were made with two public notaries present along with many other notable persons and [their reports] have been officially transcribed and redacted . . . You should know that all the Jews living in Villeneuve have been burnt by due legal process'.<sup>51</sup> Of those making accusations, none descended further down the social hierarchy than a notary, and they ranged from patrician aldermen and castellans to rulers as illustrious as Lord Amadéo VI, Count of Savoy.<sup>52</sup>

Of course, these elites did not always abide by the niceties of the law: in Basel, without any judicial sentence, they locked up the Jewish community, separated 130 children from their parents, baptized them by force, and burned the six hundred adults alive

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 185; *Black Death*, ed. Horrox, 211–19. Other cities which found the Jews guilty of well-poisoning listed in these letters include Brisac, Endingen, Munich, Tübingen and several places in the duchy of Bade; see also Ephraïm, 'Histoire des Juifs d'Alsace', pt 2, p. 51.

<sup>51</sup> *Black Death*, ed. Horrox, 219. Also, chroniclers such as Lorenz Freis of Würzburg reported that 'secular courts had adjudicated the sentences that condemned the Jews' to mass execution by burning: cited in Arnold, 'Pest — Geissler — Judenmorde: das Beispiel Würzburg', 361–2.

<sup>52</sup> *Urkunden und Akten der Stadt Strassburg*, v, ed. Witte and Wolfram, no. 185. This is one of three letters translated in *Black Death*, ed. Horrox, 216. See also Ephraïm, 'Histoire des Juifs d'Alsace', pt 2, pp. 48–9.

on a sandbank on the Rhine.<sup>53</sup> Beyond the scope of the surviving Strasbourg letters, guild governments and their members were involved in the Jewish accusations and executions at Basel, Erfurt, Nuremberg and Würzburg. According to Alfred Haverkamp, however, 'the initiative and decisive impulse' came from the gentry (Junkers) and patricians or even the regional prince in these towns. Support may have reached into the middle ranks of the guilds as at Basel, but did not (according to Haverkamp) involve artisans.<sup>54</sup> In Erfurt, the city aldermen and sons of patricians were accompanied by only 'a few artisans' in their 1349 round-up and burning of their Jews.<sup>55</sup> As with the guild government in Strasbourg, the Würzburg city council was sceptical about the accusations and sent letters to many cities asking what to do with their Jews, while the city's bishop, who was responsible for protecting the Jews, was concerned only with getting his hands on their assets once they had been murdered.<sup>56</sup> Of 1,029 towns, villages and regions surveyed in the volumes of *Germania Judaica* for the Black Death period, citizens and peasants (but even here not the rabble) appear to have carried out Jewish persecutions against the will of ruling elites in only one case — the town of Halle. The source for that claim, however, comes from the archbishop's own *Gesta*.<sup>57</sup>

#### IV

As we have seen, historians have attributed an economic rationale to these acts of hysteria and hatred.<sup>58</sup> The poor, they claim, were

<sup>53</sup> Alfred Haverkamp, "‘Conflitti interni’ e collegamenti sovralocali nelle città tedesche durante la prima metà del XIV secolo", in Reinhard Elze and Gina Fasoli (eds.), *Aristocrazia cittadina e ceti popolari nel tardo Medioevo in Italia e in Germania* (Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico, xiii, Bologna, 1984), 162; *Germania Judaica*, ed. Avneri, ii, 53.

<sup>54</sup> See Haverkamp, 'Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes', 53, 61–8; Bergdolt, *Der Schwarze Tod in Europa*, 141; *Germania Judaica*, ed. Avneri, ii, 51–5 (Basel); 215–24 (Erfurt); 598–613 (Nuremberg); 928–36 (Würzburg).

<sup>55</sup> *Germania Judaica*, ed. Avneri, ii, 220.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 932.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 320–1.

<sup>58</sup> See above. For long-term explanations that see Jewish usury as fundamental to anti-Semitism from the twelfth century onwards, see the historiographical summary of Berger, *From Crusades to Blood Libels to Expulsions*, 12–13. Certainly, earlier persecutions of Jews had economic rationales. For instance, the pogrom at York in 1190 culminated in a bonfire of the records of loans made by Jews. It would be wrong, however, to assume that the mob always, or even usually, comprised the lower classes;

(cont. on p. 22)

opportunists: by murdering Jews, they could steal their property and cancel their debts. As with other periods of Jewish history, these historians have assumed transhistorically that Jewish wealth and Jews as usurers inflamed the wrath of artisans and peasants, and that Jews had ruthlessly exploited these groups with exorbitant rates, taking their pound of flesh.<sup>59</sup> Did the working classes universally despise Jews and their usury as is so often assumed? First, Stuart Jenks has shown that in certain German-speaking regions, such as the territory of Würzburg (where the Jews were slaughtered in 1349), Jews made few loans to peasants or to the urban proletariat during the first half of the fourteenth century, and although some loans were made to merchants, mostly they went to noblemen in the countryside: 'The typical Jewish debtor was an aristocrat'.<sup>60</sup> This pattern has been confirmed elsewhere in German-speaking areas — even if in places such as Speyer and lower Bavaria, the ranks of Jewish debtors also included urban elites.<sup>61</sup>

(n. 58 cont.)

instead, at York and Lincoln in 1190 it was made up of citizens and country landlords. See Edward Miller and John Hatcher, *Medieval England: Towns, Commerce and Crafts, 1086–1348* (London, 1995), 388.

<sup>59</sup> For this image and its refutation for the early fourteenth century in Marseille, see Joseph Shatzmiller, *Shylock Reconsidered: Jews, Moneylending, and Medieval Society* (Berkeley, 1990).

<sup>60</sup> Stuart Jenks, 'Judenverschuldung und Verfolgung von Juden im 14. Jahrhundert: Franken bis 1349', *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, lxxv (1978), esp. 331–2, 345. He concludes that a long-term resentment between Christian debtors and their Jewish creditors as a cause of the Black Death massacres is insupportable: there was no connection between debtors and persecutors (p. 346).

<sup>61</sup> In Speyer, where Jews had greater privileges than elsewhere, they were involved in the high finance of the bishop and the Holy Roman Emperor; Ernst Voltmer, 'Zur Geschichte der Juden im spätmittelalterlichen Speyer', in Haverkamp (ed.), *Zur Geschichte der Juden*, 102 ff. For lower Bavaria, Michael Toch, 'Geld und Kredit in einer spätmittelalterlichen Landschaft: zu einem unbeachteten hebräischen Schuldenregister aus Niederbayern (1329–1332)', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, xxxviii (1982), esp. 509–13, finds that those who took loans from Jews also came predominantly from the ruling classes, but unlike in Franconia included patricians, judges, bourgeois and some artisans from cities such as Straubing. Toch also argues in his 'Between Impotence and Power — the Jews in the Economy and Polity of Medieval Europe', in Simonetta Cavaciocchi (ed.), *Poteri economici e poteri politici, secc. XIII–XVIII: atti della 'trigesima settimana di studi', 27 aprile – 1 maggio 1998* (Florence, 1999), 242, that only during the fifteenth century were Jewish bankers in Germany 'forced to relinquish moneylending to the rich and powerful and confine themselves to dealing with the lower middle classes and the poor'. By contrast, Graus, *Pest — Geissler — Judenmorde*, 360–1, asserts that Jews made loans at high rates of interest to the peasants and the poor 'because no one else would do it'. He also maintains (pp. 370, 382) that economic competition between

(cont. on p. 23)



Secondly, studies of Jews in Marseille and other places in France,<sup>62</sup> Assisi,<sup>63</sup> and Perugia,<sup>64</sup> along with my own research in the territory of Florence, should cause us to question the stereotype forged by modern historians of supposed enlightened elites protecting Jews against the hatred unleashed by masses of peasants and workers exploited by Jewish usury. Instead, the expulsion of Jewish moneylenders, who more often than not lent money at lower rates of interest than Christians,<sup>65</sup> could create serious problems for small townsmen and peasants. In January 1406, for instance, the Florentine patrician government passed a law expelling Jewish usurers from the towns and villages of its hinterland. The city's rationale was twofold: the killers of Christ were 'polluting' the countryside, and their usurious loans were detrimental to these countrymen. After a period of peasant wars in the Florentine territory against steep rises in taxes to pay for the city's wars against Milan, Florence presented itself as acting with charitable foresight on behalf of its impoverished subjects of the countryside (*contado*).<sup>66</sup> But Florence's *contadini* saw things differently

(n. 61 cont.)

Jews and Christians was one of the underlying causes that led to the pogroms of 1348–51. However, he supplies no concrete evidence of any such loans or of this economic competition. (In addition, see Bergdolt, *Der Schwarze Tod in Europa*, 120, 143.) As early as 1949, however, Kisch, *Jews in Medieval Germany*, 225, argued persuasively: 'In the entire source material . . . reaching up to the fifteenth century, there is not even a single instance providing or even indicating indebtedness of peasants to Jews'. For Jewish moneylenders' involvement in high finance and even international loans before the Black Death, see Franz-Josef Ziwe, 'Zum jüdischen Kapitalmarkt im spätmittelalterlichen Koblenz', in Friedhelm Burgard *et al.* (eds.), *Hochfinanz im Westen des Reiches, 1150–1500* (Trier, 1996); Gerd Mentgen, 'Herausragende jüdische Finanziere im mittelalterlichen Straßburg', *ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Shatzmiller, *Shylock Reconsidered*; Kohn, *Les Juifs de la France du Nord*, 213.

<sup>63</sup> Ariel Toaff, *The Jews in Medieval Assisi, 1305–1487: A Social and Economic History of a Small Jewish Community in Italy* (Florence, 1979), 150–1.

<sup>64</sup> Ariel Toaff, *Gli Ebrei a Perugia* (Perugia, 1975), 19.

<sup>65</sup> See nn. 62–4 above. Moreover, for the right to settle within the city walls of Florence, Jews had to agree first to charge rates no higher than 15 per cent per annum in 1396 and by 1430, 20 per cent, while Christian bankers were allowed to charge 25 per cent: see Michele Luzzati, 'Florence against the Jews or the Jews against Florence?', in Stanislao G. Pugliese (ed.), *The Most Ancient Minorities: The Jews of Italy* (Westport, 2002), 63–5.

<sup>66</sup> See Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Provvisioni registri, no. 94, fos. 232<sup>v</sup>–233<sup>v</sup>, 24 Jan. 1404; Umberto Cassuto, *Gli Ebrei a Firenze nell'età del rinascimento* (Florence, 1918), 362–3; Anthony Molho, 'A Note on Jewish Moneylenders in Tuscany in the Late Trecento and Early Quattrocento', in Anthony Molho and John A. Tedeschi (eds.), *Renaissance: Studies in Honor of Hans Baron* (Florence, 1971); Anthony Molho, *Florentine Public Finances in the Early Renaissance, 1400–1433* (Cambridge,

(cont. on p. 24)

and failed to appreciate their city lords' affectation of *noblesse oblige*. Over the next twenty years Arezzo, Pistoia and San Gimignano with their hinterlands, along with scattered villages in the Valdelsa and Castiglion Aretino, wrote threatening petitions to the town council of Florence describing the inconveniences created by the central government's interference in their economies and most emphatically by the removal of their Jews. They demanded that their Jews be allowed to resettle and once again make loans within these communities. If the ruling councils refused, they threatened to withhold their taxes.

The Florentine government expelled Jews in some communities more than once between 1406 and the rise of the Medici in 1434.<sup>67</sup> After Volterra successfully petitioned for the return of its Jews in 1420, it was deprived of them again as a punishment for its abortive revolt in 1429. In 1432, the town petitioned a second time and won its appeal to have the Jews return. In early Renaissance Florence the elites were the ones to preach anti-Semitic doctrines and pass laws expelling Jews, while 'the rabble' of impoverished peasants and small-townsmen burdened by Florence's excessive taxation supported their local Jews and valued their instruments of credit.<sup>68</sup> Other places in central Italy show similar sides in the support and condemnation of Jewish communities. As late as the end of the fifteenth century, commoners lived in harmony with Jews: they granted them rights of citizenship and honoured their credit operations, while patricians were the first to be stirred by anti-Semitic Franciscan preaching, to condemn Jewish moneylenders, and eventually to expel them from their lands.<sup>69</sup>

(n. 66 cont.)

Mass., 1971), 38–9; Luzzati, 'Florence against the Jews or the Jews against Florence?', 62.

<sup>67</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Provvisioni registri, no. 110, fos. 104<sup>r</sup>–105<sup>r</sup>, 28 Nov. 1420; no. 123, fo. 5<sup>r-v</sup>, 29 Mar. 1432. Jews settled within the city walls of Florence only by 1437.

<sup>68</sup> For a discussion of these petitions, see Samuel K. Cohn, *Creating the Florentine State: Peasants and Revolt, 1348–1434* (Cambridge, 1999), 224, 241, 243.

<sup>69</sup> Daniel Bornstein, 'Law, Religion, and Economics: Jewish Moneylenders in Christian Cortona', in John A. Marino and Thomas Kuehn (eds.), *A Renaissance of Conflicts: Visions and Revisions of Law and Society in Italy and Spain* (Toronto, 2004), finds that in Cortona, patrician families were the ones to respond to the new wave of Franciscan preaching against the Jews, to pass laws against them, and to fund a *monte di pietà* (i.e. a pawn bank that made cheap loans to the poor in order to drive Jews from the money market) in 1494. Similarly, in Spoleto, Perugia and other cities of central Italy,

(cont. on p. 25)

Reread in this context, Strasbourg's letters not only show that it was the elites and not workers and peasants who initiated the burnings of the Jews in 1348–9, they give little hint of resentment over Jewish moneylending or economic privilege as the motivation behind the massacres that spread across cities and regions of the Rhineland and beyond, even if, in towns such as Worms and Speyer, Jews held special privileges from the bishop and emperor.<sup>70</sup> None of the Jews caught and tortured into confessing, nor any of the Jews whom they revealed under duress as part of their supposed nefarious networks of poisoners, was a tax collector or a wealthy financial supporter of the duke of Austria, the emperor, or of any other figure of authority; and, more to the point, not one of the Jews singled out for torture was labelled a usurer.<sup>71</sup> Instead, with the exception of one merchant who was tortured because he was a community leader with extensive contacts, and two who were called 'rich',<sup>72</sup> the victims were doctors, women, students, cantors and, most often, rabbis.<sup>73</sup> The letters do not point to any immediate economic advantages for the persecutors, even if after the massacres some may have profited from the death of Jews, confiscation of their property, or seizure of property simply left vacant because of their extermination.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, it was the rich and privileged who afterwards

(n. 69 cont.)

Jews enjoyed privileges as citizens and rights that were the same as those of Christians until the mid fifteenth century. Moreover, Christian masses in other areas of Europe were not the first ones to respond to the new wave of Jewish hatred preached by Franciscans during the mid fifteenth century; instead it was patricians and noblemen. See Alfred Haverkamp, 'Jews and Urban Life: Bonds and Relationships', in Cluse (ed.), *Jews of Europe in the Middle Ages*, 55–69; Toaff, *Gli Ebrei a Perugia*, 59–127, esp. 62. Finally, unlike Jewish moneylenders in German-speaking areas, Jews in central Italy made small loans largely to rural and small-town artisans, soldiers and peasants: see the one surviving Jewish account book from the early fifteenth century, Daniel Carpi, 'The Account Book of a Jewish Moneylender in Montepulciano (1409–1410)', *Jl European Econ. Hist.*, xiv (1985).

<sup>70</sup> On Speyer, see Voltmer, 'Zur Geschichte der Juden im spätmittelalterlichen Speyer'; Haverkamp, 'Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes'; and for Speyer and Worms, see Kisch, *Jews in Medieval Germany*, 72, 101, 267.

<sup>71</sup> In a letter from Offenburg to Strasbourg noblemen were mentioned, who owed loans to Jews; *Urkunden und Akten der Stadt Strassburg*, v, ed. Witte and Wolfram, no. 196.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 189.

<sup>73</sup> The most extensive list of tortured Jews and accomplices is found *ibid.*, no. 185; see also no. 183.

<sup>74</sup> For Brussels, see, for instance, Kohn, *Les Juifs de la France du Nord*, 10.

fought over and divided the spoils, not workers and peasants.<sup>75</sup> But even among the elites the overwhelming motivation appears to have been religious hatred and not opportunistic economic gain.<sup>76</sup>

## V

The passing of the Black Death certainly did not end assaults on Jews. Such attacks, however, did subside for thirty years or more. Across wide swathes of German-speaking lands and France, rulers and communities recoiled from their brutal crimes against the Jews. As early as 1350, Charles IV reinstated his earlier privileges and protection to attract Jews back to Augsburg;<sup>77</sup> in April of the same year, the margrave of Brandenburg offered tax exemptions for a year to any Jew who would settle in Neuberg.<sup>78</sup> In 1352 Duke Ludwig offered Jews special protection to resettle in Bavaria.<sup>79</sup> In the same year Speyer and the archbishop of Mainz offered special incentives to attract Jews back to their decimated communities. Such efforts continued in parts of Germany as late as 1372.<sup>80</sup> In 1360 Duke Rudolph of Austria and his brothers granted Jews permission to resettle in his territories, Alsace and Swabia.<sup>81</sup> Further, new laws such as those of the *Meissener Rechtsbuch* promulgated in the years after the Black Death persecutions dealt with Jews more favourably than those found in any earlier medieval German law books: Jews were treated as equal to Christians, and Christian authorities recognized Jewish law and Jewish courts.<sup>82</sup> In 1355 King John II of France granted royal privileges to Jews in order to allow them to acquire and possess houses and residences, and exempted them from special taxes.<sup>83</sup> In 1361 he extended these privileges throughout his realm to

<sup>75</sup> Graus, *Pest — Geissler — Judenmorde*, 243–8, 385.

<sup>76</sup> Haverkamp, 'Die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit des Schwarzen Todes', 46–50, shows that the burning of Jews across a number of cities occurred on Sundays and religious feast days and argues that these attacks followed religious preaching.

<sup>77</sup> *Germania Judaica*, ed. Avneri, ii, 36.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>80</sup> See *ibid.*, 166 (for Dinkelsbühl), 173 (for Dortmund).

<sup>81</sup> Ephraïm, 'Histoire des Juifs d'Alsace', pt 2, p. 58; for other towns that reversed their policies in the 1360s and 1370s to allow Jewish resettlement and offer protection, see *ibid.*, pp. 55–6.

<sup>82</sup> Kisch, *Jews in Medieval Germany*, 41–4, 101, 251.

<sup>83</sup> Kohn, *Les Juifs de la France du Nord*, 14.

attract Jewish immigration.<sup>84</sup> Following the Black Death, Jews in Spain gained prestigious governmental positions and patronage of the crown, which, according to Angus MacKay, eventually led to Christian jealousy and was a reason for the persecutions of the Jews in 1391.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, further strikes of plague did not unleash repeat performances of hatred and mass executions against the Jews in the Middle Ages. Not until the late sixteenth century did authorities once again arrest people suspected of spreading the plague through poisons and tampering with food; these later waves of fear, however, did not target Jews as the principal suspects; instead, witches or hospital workers were now persecuted.<sup>86</sup> The only major exception for the later Middle Ages was for parts of Poland around Miechów in 1360, areas that had escaped the first wave of plague in 1348–51. The plague of 1360 was in effect for these regions their 1348.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Poliakov, *History of Anti-Semitism*, i, 113; Voltmer, 'Zur Geschichte der Juden im spätmittelalterlichen Speyer', 102; for the 1361 legislation in France, see Kohn, *Les Juifs de la France du Nord*, 14–28.

<sup>85</sup> Angus MacKay, 'Popular Movements and Pogroms in Fifteenth-Century Castile', *Past and Present*, no. 55 (May 1972), 39–40.

<sup>86</sup> William G. Naphy, *Plagues, Poisons and Potions: Plague-Spreading Conspiracies in the Western Alps, c. 1530–1640* (Manchester, 2002), chs. 4–5. Even when health officials and other authorities asserted that plague had been carried to their towns by Jewish second-hand clothiers as had happened in Milan and Mantua during the plagues of 1576–7, no mass Jewish persecution ensued: see, for instance, Ascanio Centorio degli Ortensi, *I Cinque Libri degl'avvertimenti, ordini, gride et editi fatti, et osservati in Milano, ne' tempi sospettosi della peste: ne gli anni MDLXXVI et LXXVII* (Venice, 1579), 2.

<sup>87</sup> The author of the *Annales Mechovienses*, ed. Wilhelm Arndt (MGH, Scriptores, xix, Hannover, 1866), 669–70, discusses in detail the Black Death of 1348, giving reports of the number of funerals per diem in places as far away as Avignon and of the consequences of 1349 with the Flagellant movements that marched from Hungary across Germany, but he mentions no plague within his own region until 1360, when he claims that hardly a third of the population of this region remained after the plague, and it was even worse for Kraków. He claims 'the death' was spread by the Jews' poison and that in Kraków and other places the Jews were burned (p. 670). Another possible exception may have been Zurich in 1400, when Jews were rounded up, put in sheep pens, and burned alive, but although plague struck many parts of Europe in 1400, the Zurich chronicler does not specify that it hit Zurich in that year and, more importantly, does not draw any connection between plague and the Jewish burnings: *Chronik der Stadt Zürich*, ed. Johannes Dierauer (Quellen zur Schweizer Geschichte, xviii, Basel, 1900), 161. O. Dito, *La storia calabrese e la dimora degli ebrei in Calabria dal sec. Valla seconda metà del sec. XVI* (Rocca S. Casciano, 1916), 271 — cited in Ariel Toaff, *Love, Work, and Death: Jewish Life in Medieval Umbria*, trans. Judith Landry (London, 1996), 124 — mentions that Jews were suspected of poisoning wells and causing a plague in 1422, but no pogrom against them followed.

Attacks on Jews returned to haunt Europe by the early 1380s. These were not spurred on by plague, however, and they differed markedly from the mass burnings of 1348–51. Unlike the Black Death massacres, these showed signs of economic and political motivation on the assailants' part, and class divisions between the assailants and their adversaries. In 1384 Jews were rounded up in Augsburg, Nuremberg and surrounding small towns, and released only after payment of a sizeable ransom. In the following year delegates from thirty-eight German-speaking cities met in Ulm to proclaim a general cancellation of debts owed to Jews.<sup>88</sup> By contrast, in 1348–9, the chronicles and archival sources hardly mention even the pillaging of Jewish property;<sup>89</sup> death and destruction alone were the principal, if not the sole, aims of the Black Death hatred. When the persecutors burned anything other than the Jews themselves, their homes or synagogues, it was their books, and these were not account books, tax ledgers or letters of credit but, instead, the Torah and other sacred writings. Religious motivations behind the Black Death pogroms can also be seen in accompanying allegations of Host desecration and ritual murder.<sup>90</sup>

Further, the anti-Semitic incidents that reappeared in France in the early 1380s — two in Paris (1380 and 1382) and one in Rouen (1382) — were phases within much larger tax revolts against the king by journeymen and artisans. Class divisions clearly delineated these later conflicts: artisans and the poor challenged the authority of the crown and merchant elites, even if, according to the Religieux de Saint-Denis (Michel Pintoin, Charles VI's official historian), the nobility incited the crowds 'to further and more beastly action' in order to cancel their own debts. Furthermore, these attacks against Jews erupted after the major thrust of social revolt had already run its course: the chroniclers stress the economic and political goals of the insurgents. To quote Pintoin:

Not content with the tax concessions that Charles VI had made to the Parisian crowd in 1380, they forced open the coffers containing the tax

<sup>88</sup> Poliakov, *History of Anti-Semitism*, i, 118–19. Such actions can be spotted also in periods before the Black Death; for instance in 1337 the city council of Deckendorf, Bavaria, cancelled its debts to Jews at a stroke: see Cecil Roth, *A Short History of the Jewish People . . . Revised and Enlarged Illustrated Edition* (London, 1959), 231.

<sup>89</sup> Breuer, "Black Death" and Antisemitism', 150, claims that 'a number of chroniclers . . . emphasized that the main cause was the lust for Jewish possessions', but he fails to note a single one.

<sup>90</sup> Müller, 'Erez gererah — "Land of Persecution"', 257.



monies, seized the records of the royal tax receipts, tore them to pieces and destroyed them. Then, still driven by the same impetuous spirit for change, they entered with fury into the quarter that the king had granted to the Jews, comprising forty houses. Pressing on, they abandoned all individual traits of human character, age and other distinctive qualities. Some forced open the doors of the Jews' houses, searching them thoroughly to plunder and steal anything that appeared useful. Others took necklaces, rings, belts and other feminine ornaments, which were easy to carry off. They searched greedily for silk cloaks and other expensive clothing. They threw from the windows silver vases, which they took to their homes. Others preferred to cancel their debts to nobles and bourgeois, believing this to be more lucrative. Several nobles, who had joined them, incited them to go further.<sup>91</sup>

Letters of remission issued by the king to those who molested individual Jews during the riots corroborate Pintoin's observations. No letter gives any evidence of murder during the 1380 revolt; instead, individual theft and profit were the predators' objectives.<sup>92</sup> Finally, unlike the earlier chroniclers of the Black Death massacres with their tallies of numbers killed in one city after another, the meticulous Pintoin does not give any inkling of mass round-ups and extermination of Jews, or even of the murder of a single Jew. Similarly, the other principal chronicler of these revolts, an anonymous nobleman from Normandy, also described the pillaging of Jewish movable property but not Jewish murder at the hands of Christians or the senseless destruction of their property. Only one Jew, a rabbi, was noted as a victim of the Parisian revolt of 1380.<sup>93</sup> On the following day the king gave the Jews protection to enable them to return to their homes and decreed that all their stolen goods be returned — an edict the people defiantly disobeyed in order to pour scorn on the king, who had broken his pledge and levied new taxes.

The Parisian revolt of the hammer men (*Maillotins*), which erupted in the vegetable market of Les Halles two years later, followed the same pattern. Attacks against Jews came only at the end of the revolt, after the insurgents had risen against tax

<sup>91</sup> [Michel Pintoin], *Chronique du Religieux de Saint-Denys*, ed. M. L. Bellaguet, 6 vols. (Paris, 1839–52), vi, pt 1, bk 1, ch. 7, pp. 53–6; Guillaume Cousinot I, *Geste de Nobles*, ed. Vallet de Viriville (Paris, 1859), 106–7. Others, such as Jean Froissart, do not even mention these attacks against the Jews.

<sup>92</sup> See the letters of remission published by Léon Mirot, *Les Insurrections urbaines au début du règne de Charles VI (1380–1383): leurs causes, leurs conséquences* (Paris, 1905), 35–6, 112–13, 116–17, 119–20; *Popular Protest in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Cohn, nos. 156–7, 160.

<sup>93</sup> *Chronique des quatre premiers Valois*, ed. Siméon Luce (Société Histoire de France, cix, Paris, 1862), 291–2.

collectors, murdered them, and stolen the hammers kept in the Parisian prison and royal citadel of Châtelet. As Pintoin relates:

No doubt, provoked by shouts from the most abject of them, as before, the most wicked went after the Jews, whom the king protected; they killed some and stole their most valuable possessions. Adding to their infamy, they felt no shame in violating the house of the king, incurring for a second time the crime of treason.<sup>94</sup>

Here, explicitly, the attack on the king's protected Jews was an insult and a means of challenging the king. Further, the letters of remission tell of officers of the crown and members of the bourgeoisie of Paris intervening to save Jews, giving them refuge in Châtelet.<sup>95</sup>

Pintoin and chroniclers of Normandy report even less about any damage that may have been inflicted on Jews during the tax revolt in Rouen — the *Harelle* — that erupted the week before the *Maillotins* in Paris. As with the Parisian revolt, the *Harelle* centred on protests against Charles VI's new taxes; there were attacks against Rouen's wealthy bourgeois, and the great abbeys were stripped of their secular privileges over the city. In colourful and lengthy descriptions of this tax revolt, neither Pintoin nor the principal local chronicle, *Chronique des quatre premiers Valois*, mentions any attacks against Jews. Only a later Norman chronicler, Pierre Cochon, reports anti-Semitic violence. To his surprise, 'given all the mayhem', only one Jew was killed. Furthermore, Cochon makes it clear that the butt of the crowd's anger was not the Jews but the city's ruling bourgeois and their previous mayors who had 'treated the artisans so badly'. The journeymen broke into their palaces, tore them asunder, and dished out their wine to the populace in the streets and squares of the city. Cochon adds that moneylenders were also robbed, but these included priests and Christians along with Jews.<sup>96</sup> Property, not bodies or even conversions, was the object of these insurrections.

Archival documents — letters of remission — confirm the impressions related by chroniclers. In none of the published letters were the insurgents of Rouen accused of anti-Semitic attacks, and those which allude to such attacks during the revolts in Paris in 1380 and 1382 concern theft of Jewish property by those

<sup>94</sup> [Pintoin], *Chronique du Religieux de Saint-Denys*, ed. Bellaguet, i, 128–43.

<sup>95</sup> Mirot, *Les Insurrections urbaines au début du règne de Charles VI*, 119–20.

<sup>96</sup> *Chronique Normande de Pierre Cochon notaire apostolique à Rouen*, ed. Ch. de Robillard de Beaurepaire (Rouen, 1870), ch. 11, pp. 162–6.

rioting against the king's taxes. The primary objectives of the insurgents were political and economic, not religious: in the first instance, the revolts and violence had not been spurred on by anti-Semitic hatred.<sup>97</sup> Only one case suggests that religious differences played a strong role: after attending a neighbourhood assembly against royal taxes during the Paris revolt of the hammer men in March 1382, a group of journeymen and soldiers 'came upon a Jew and told him he should become a Christian and renounce his false faith'. Allegedly, the Jew refused and spat in the face of those who ridiculed his religion. Incensed, the group 'beat the Jew savagely'; later, he died.<sup>98</sup> But none of the other letters points to religion per se as a reason for any of the insurgents' assaults. Moreover, unlike the interregional, even international, massacres of the First Crusade in 1096, the Shepherds' crusades in 1320, the attacks on lepers and Jews in 1321, and especially the extermination of entire communities across wide swathes of Europe in 1348–51, the attacks of the 1380s against Jews in Paris and Rouen did not spread to neighbouring towns; they failed even to spread beyond city walls into the countryside.<sup>99</sup>

## VI

Certainly, the 1391 persecutions of the Jews in Spain differed from the minor attacks that spilled over from the tax revolts a decade earlier in Paris and Rouen. In Spain, they swept from city to city, across Catalonia and Valencia to Perpignan in the north and to the Balearic islands in the east. From rich archival sources, Philippe Wolff charted their rapid spread, what he called their 'contagion'.<sup>100</sup> The casualties were much higher than in northern France. The year 1391 was in effect Spain's 1348–9, in that these events sealed the demographic fate of Spanish Jewry for centuries to come, though the result came more from mass conversion than mass murder as happened in 1348–9.<sup>101</sup> But was

<sup>97</sup> Mirot, *Les Insurrections urbaines au début du règne de Charles VI*, 35–6, 112–13, 116–17, 119–20.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 112–13; *Popular Protest in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Cohn, no. 157.

<sup>99</sup> See Kohn, *Les Juifs de la France du Nord*, 50.

<sup>100</sup> Philippe Wolff, 'The 1391 Pogrom in Spain: Social Crisis or Not?', *Past and Present*, no. 50 (Feb. 1971), 17.

<sup>101</sup> On the persecutions of 1391, see *ibid.*; Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1966), ii, ch. 10; Claude Carrère, *Barcelone: centre économique à l'époque des difficultés, 1380–1462*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1967), ii, 675–80.

(cont. on p. 32)

1391 in other ways a carbon copy of 1348–9 — mass hysteria of elites and not a class confrontation of lower classes seeking economic, political or social ends? On these questions, Wolff studied the revolts in Barcelona and Gerona, not only from the perspective of the chroniclers but from the vantage point of town records and royal letters of remission. His findings show that the social and political context and character of these revolts differed radically from the massacres of Jews through the Rhineland, Savoy and other parts of Europe in the wake of the Black Death. First, since the Black Death, Jews had done well in Spain under the protection and patronage of the crown. Men such as Yussaf Pichon became chief financial advisers to kings, and, more generally, Jews had become the crown's principal tax farmers.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, the revolts of 1391 in Spain, like those in northern France in the early 1380s, were tax revolts. Again, as in France, the insurgents' anger stemmed not only from the amount they were forced to pay but also from taxes that they now saw as unfair: they demanded that the king charge a tallage or tax based proportionately on wealth and cancel regressive taxes based on the sale of commodities.

The archival sources confirm the impressions of the chroniclers: these were revolts of the lower classes, even if a scattering of nobles appear among the arrested. The leaders were artisans and those who later received pardons were mainly from this level of society or below — slaves, weavers, mariners, cobblers and

(n. 101 cont.)

Joaquim Nadal Farreras and Philippe Wolff, *Histoire de la Catalogne* (Toulouse, 1982); Jaume Riera i Sans, 'Los tumultos contra las juderías de la Corona de Aragón en 1391', in *La mutación de la segunda mitad del siglo XIV en España* (Cuadernos de Historia, Anexos de la revista Hispania, viii, Madrid, 1977); David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1996), 244 ff.; David Nirenberg, 'Mass Conversion and Genealogical Mentalities: Jews and Christians in Fifteenth-Century Spain', *Past and Present*, no. 174 (Feb. 2002), esp. 9–10; Antoni Furió, *Història del País Valencià* (Valencia, 1995), 145–51. On conversions and forced baptisms, see, especially, the documents published by Riera i Sans, 'Los tumultos contra las juderías', 220–1, 223–4. In Valencia, the insurgents' cries against Moors and Jews were 'Muyren o-s facen christians' and 'Muyren los juheus o-s facen christians!' (pp. 220–1, 223).

<sup>102</sup> Abraham A. Neuman, *The Jews of Spain: Their Social, Political, and Cultural Life during the Middle Ages*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1944–8), ii, 237–8, 256–60; Wolff, '1391 Pogrom in Spain', 12; David Romano, 'Les Juifs de la Couronne d'Aragon avant 1391', *Revue des études juives*, cxli (1982), 178; David Romano, 'Los funcionarios judíos de Pedro el Grande de Aragón', *Boletín de la Real Academia de Buenas Letras de Barcelona*, xxxiii (1969), 9–10.

carpenters. The most elite of any to be granted a pardon because of these riots at Barcelona was a notary. In addition, the targets were not just Jews. According to the chronicler Mascaro, the insurgents 'threatened to kill all clerics and forced them to pay taxes and other contributions as if they were laymen. Silversmiths, merchants and other rich people were threatened with death'. Finally, despite some executions, Barcelona's revolt largely succeeded: taxes were lowered.<sup>103</sup>

Similarly, letters of remission at Gerona show that the rank and file of the rebels were artisans, of whom typically the weaver Joan Torayles, the tailor Pere Planell and the cobbler Pere Beto were not condemned for attacking Jews alone but for demanding lower taxes and that they be changed from regressive commodity taxes to ones proportionate to the 'faculties' of those charged.<sup>104</sup> In addition, at Gerona, peasants from the surrounding countryside joined the artisans and laid siege to the city's royal citadel. In the territories of both cities, as well as in other regions, peasants 'agitated against the newly-imposed evil customs (*malos usos*), a new form of serfdom'.<sup>105</sup> On the other side of the barricades stood not only royal troops but also urban elites seeking to suppress the rebels, who this time comprised anti-Semitic lower classes in the main.

More recently, Jaume Riera i Sans has published more letters of remission and other archival documents confirming that 'the struggle between classes' during the anti-Jewish tumults of 1391 was not exclusive to Gerona or Barcelona. In Valencia, where it is more difficult to pin down the perpetrators to particular individuals or occupational groups, 'the people' (*poble*) confronted agents of the crown who protected the Jews.<sup>106</sup> Although knights, citizens, officers and churchmen joined the crowds, the riots were initiated by forty to fifty adolescents and comprised mainly vagabonds, criminals and the poor (*homens de poca e pobra condició*). On the other side, despite their small numbers, the Jews of Valencia had become major figures in commerce, finance and other economic activities. Already during the war with Castile (1356–76),

<sup>103</sup> Wolff, '1391 Pogrom in Spain', 12. He adds that the town minutes of Barcelona (the book of the Council) confirm these observations.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>106</sup> Riera i Sans, 'Los tumultos contra las juderías', 223; Furió, *Història del País Valencià*, 147.

Valencia's wealthiest Jew, Jafudà Alatzar, 'practically controlled' all the region's finances.<sup>107</sup> In addition, the perpetrators in Valencia, as in Barcelona and Gerona, were not bent simply on killing or converting non-Christians; they went after their wealth along with that of the crown.<sup>108</sup>

In short, post-plague attacks on Jews paralleled the course of violence in general during and immediately after the first wave of the Black Death to the early fifteenth century. The evidence shows no signs of violence against Jews percolating up from 'a thick sediment in the popular mentality' in 1348–51, as Ginzburg claimed, nor of a class struggle of impoverished debtors intent on butchering their wealthy Jewish exploiters, as others have asserted. Black Death fears and realities had not moved frenzied mobs of artisans and peasants to initiate the pogroms, nor suddenly to redress economic grievances against a supposed usurious Jewish elite. As with the flagellants, the perpetrators of violence may have stretched across social barriers, but, judging by the archival records and the chronicles, patrician city governments, rural castellans, regional dukes and the Holy Roman Emperor himself initiated, organized and carried out the Jewish massacres. Neither usurers nor property were the prime targets of these anti-Semitic exterminations; rather, their instigators sought to seize and torture the leaders of Jewish communities, principally rabbis. Afterwards, the elites realized that these massacres had redounded to their own economic detriment.

By contrast, the battlegrounds of riots in Paris and Rouen in the early 1380s and in Spain in 1391 were drawn along class lines. Not only kings but also local bourgeois and city councils strove to protect their Jews, while artisans and peasants comprised the bulk of the anti-Semitic crowds. Further, these revolts were not simply, or even primarily, attacks on Jews but were part of larger rebellions against taxation and the crown. Along with Jews (who often now possessed political and economic power), tax officials, Christian merchants and royal officials became the targets of these uprisings. While a residual hatred of Jews may never have been far from the surface, in northern France these tax and anti-royal protests spilled into anti-Semitic rioting only at the margins

<sup>107</sup> Furió, *Història del País Valencià*, 145–51.

<sup>108</sup> Riera i Sans, 'Los tumultos contra las juderías', esp. 218, 225; Furió, *Història del País Valencià*, 149.



and during the last stages of these revolts. Moreover, acquisition of property and cancelling debts, not racial or religious hatred, appear to have been the chief motives.

Anti-Semitic rioting in German-speaking lands followed the same pattern from the last decades of the fourteenth century until at least the 1430s. Peasants and artisans may have supplied the rank and file, but they were not bent primarily on forcing conversions or on killing the Christ-killers. Instead their sights were fixed on seizing Jewish property, cancelling debts and charging ransoms to free captured Jews.<sup>109</sup> By the 1420s the religious climate of Hussite Europe and a new anti-Semitic zeal preached by Dominicans such as St Vincent Ferrer and Franciscans such as John of Capistrano would change the face of anti-Semitism once again.<sup>110</sup>

The various episodes of anti-Semitism and the massacres of Jews throughout the late Middle Ages cannot all be tarred with the same brush. It did not always seep forth transhistorically from embedded stereotypes of the Jew as vicious usurer or from 'a thick sediment' of envy and resentment on the part of lower classes against Jews.<sup>111</sup> Nor can it be explained rationally as the consequence of a class struggle driven by Jewish commercial success and against their supposed exploitation of subaltern classes. The evidence from the late Middle Ages shows that the principal perpetrators and protectors of Jews could change rapidly even over the course of a generation. Unlike previous assaults on

<sup>109</sup> Poliakov, *History of Anti-Semitism*, i, 113–21. Perhaps, further studies on Valencia and elsewhere in Germany will temper these conclusions. Wolff, '1391 Pogrom in Spain', 16, suggested that at Valencia, 'the pseudo-religious element stands out: violence directed against the Jews predominates, committed moreover by persons from the most diverse social backgrounds; everything happened in an atmosphere of exaltation in which rumours of miracles were easily accepted'. But Wolff never completed research into the archives of Valencia. Although the sources do not reveal the social position of the actors and promoters of the pogroms as clearly as those from Barcelona and Gerona, the documents and commentary published later by Riera i Sans, 'Los tumultos contra las juderías', 217–25, show a similar confrontation between 'the people' and the bourgeois and agents of the crown, who protected the Jews, in the towns of Valencia in 1391.

<sup>110</sup> For Vincent Ferrer, see, for example, Nirenberg, 'Enmity and Assimilation', 142–5; Nirenberg, 'Mass Conversion and Genealogical Mentalities', 11–12. For the anti-Semitism of Capistrano, Giacomo della Marca, Alberto da Sarteano, Bernardino da Fletre and other Italian Franciscans of the mid and later fifteenth century, see, most recently, Bornstein, 'Law, Religion, and Economics', 246.

<sup>111</sup> On whether anti-Semitism sprouted 'bottom up' or seeped 'top down', see Berger, *From Crusades to Blood Libels to Expulsions*, 22–4.

the Jews between the First Crusade and the accusations of Host-desecration fanned by Franciscan preaching in the 1330s and 1340s, the Black Death persecutions fundamentally transformed the Jewish population across Europe for the next five hundred years — their numbers and their settlement patterns.<sup>112</sup> The sources of this most severe persecution of Jews before the twentieth century do not point, however, to mass ‘hysteria’ or a sudden unleashing of hatred from peasants, artisans and workers against the archetypal Jew — the moneylender — as is often assumed. Instead, elites, from urban oligarchs and rural knights to the Holy Roman Emperor himself, were the ones so suddenly threatened by Europe’s most monumental mortality into believing that Jews wished to destroy all Christendom,<sup>113</sup> and, as a result, they instigated and carried out the horrific massacres. They did so, moreover, with cold calculation and in actions sanctioned by due legal process. In this fashion, the contours of anti-Semitism followed the larger waves of class struggle and violence during the later Middle Ages.

*University of Glasgow*

*Samuel K. Cohn Jr*

<sup>112</sup> The literature on the resettlement of Jewish populations from German cities to Italy, Eastern Europe, and smaller towns and villages in German-speaking lands is vast: see, among others, Ariel Toaff, ‘Gli insediamenti askenaziti nell’Italia settentrionale’, in Corrado Vivanti (ed.), *Storia d’Italia: Annali*, xi, pt 1, *Dall’alto Medioevo all’età dei ghetti* (Turin, 1996), 157–9; Michele Luzzati, ‘Banchi e insediamenti ebraici nell’Italia centro-settentrionale fra tardo Medioevo e inizi dell’Età moderna’, *ibid.*, 188–9.

<sup>113</sup> Among many other places for expressions of the fear that Jews were plotting with their poisons to destroy all of Christendom, see the letter of 30 June 1349 from Schlettstadt in Alsace: *Urkunden und Akten der Stadt Strassburg*, v, ed. Witte and Wolfram, no. 208.